

Title: The Dead, The Living, and The Return of Christ

Text: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Date: October 29, 2017

Background. Many in Thessalonica are concerned about their deceased loved ones, especially in light of Paul's teaching that Christ would soon return. Would their loved ones miss out? The Thessalonians lacked understanding about what happens to Christians who die. So Paul includes this section to *encourage the church with the truth* (4:18).

Main Idea. God's promises concerning the future give us great assurance about how we are called to live today.

Key Word Study from 1 Thess 4:17. "Caught up" (harapazo). To grab or seize suddenly, to snatch, to take away. This is where we get the English term "rapture." There is much debate about the relationship between 4:13-18 and 5:1-11. Is the rapture a separate event from the Day of the Lord? The text does not give conclusive evidence, so we cannot be overly dogmatic. Christians hold a variety of views concerning the timing of the Rapture – be it before, during, or after the Day of the Lord.

4:13. Paul wants the church to become educated concerning Christians who are deceased.

4:15. Notice the chronology of being united with the Lord: the Lord descends...the authoritative voice...the cry of the archangel...the trumpet of God...the dead rise first...the living are snatched away. *Does this sound like a glorious occasion or what?*

Group Questions:

- 1) If you were to summarize Paul's main point in 4:13-18, what would you say?
- 2) Why were the Thessalonians experiencing sorrow and grief? What are some examples today where ignorance of biblical doctrine creates confusion about heaven and hell?
- 3) What are a few examples of people who grieve without hope? Have you ever noticed the palpable difference between a Christian's funeral verses the funeral of a non-believer?
- 4) Why do you think Paul refers to the deceased brothers and sisters as asleep, instead of dead? Talk through the different meanings of each word.
- 5) Read aloud the story of the Thief on the Cross (Luke 23:39-43). What did Jesus promise the unrepentant thief? Where is the thief today? Where is the unrepentant thief?
- 6) Why do you think the chronology of Christ's return calls for the dead to precede those who are currently are alive?
- 7) How should you live in light of Christ's imminent return? Give some specific examples.
- 8) Explain the contrast between verse 13 and verse 18. What did Paul specifically say in verses 14-17 that would enable the Thessalonians to move from sorrow to hope?